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ABSTRACT

If the black family is to survive, blacks must go into the community, seek out their poor, teach them, minister to them, and Work with them to solve their problems. Black youth, in particular, need support and encouragement. The most successful black children come from two-parent homes. Hence the percentage of black families--35%--headed by a female needs to be reduced, as does the related high incidence of teenage pregnancies. The struggle of black men to be men has been a long and cruel one. Black men are behind in education, economics, banking and finances, computer training, employment, and business ownership. Moreover, they are not the producers of the goods they consume. Other problems are the general inability of blacks to work well together, the high incidence of drugs, and the lack of education. To survive and progress, the black family needs to seize every opportunity and needs to revitalize Dr. King's dream of "We shall overcome." (RDN)

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THE AFRO-AMERICAN FAMILY

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AT

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

HATTIESBURG, MISSISSIPPI

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The Afro-American Family

Thank you for the kind introduction. And you beautiful students keep up the applause; I like it. Americans have a peculiar habit; they applaud a speaker before he has uttered a single word.

It is good to speak at Mississippi State University again. It was in the turbulent sixties when I last spoke here; and, on that occasion the university was all white. It was a group of courageous faculty members who invited me, then a chemist, to speak in the area of ecology; other blacks whom they invited did not come. I came; if they were fearless enough to ask me to speak, I was fearless enough to accept. All went well.

Now I am invited back. And on this occasion to give two speeches; one this evening on the Afro-American family, and another tomorrow morning that is entitled, "Are We Black"?

If the Black Family is to survive, we here, who are young and old adult blacks, must do as Jesus did -- that is, go out into the community, to seek out our poor, then teach them, minister to them and work with them to solve our many problems. Particularly, must we work with our black youth. They must know -- and we are the ones who can tell them -- that a ring in the ear, a bone in the nose, and spear in their hands will not "do it" today. That today our youth cannot fizzle out -- they must put out. They should not rust out but wear out -- not curse out but pray out -- and most certainly not sit out but work out.

Tell them about our generation when we had hard-working men and real pretty black women. Whereas today they have too many hard-working black women

and too many pretty-smelling black men. Moreover, in our generation we did achieve -- because we could read, write, spell and know that 1/8 divided by 1/3 equals 3/8. To us achievement meant advancement -- not retrogression; it meant improvement -- not decay; it meant accomplishment -- not failure; and, it meant going forward, not backwards.

With God's help we must strengthen the black family. It is sad to know that more than 35 percent of our black families are headed by a female. We must work to decrease this percentage.

I am aware that I am speaking to the converted this evening. Your community has many fine families who rear their children with strong religious, educational and moral values -- and the results are that they grow into fine citizens -- but there are many other families that do not do as we do. They need our help. The causes of the 35 percent figure are many but one is the vast increase of teenage pregnancies. Today "babies are having babies" -- and females are not the sole blame. Too many fathers do not teach their sons that the definition of manhood is not that one can make a girl pregnant -- that is a biological fact that any normal male can accomplish. Manhood means caring for and loving the wife and the child.

W. C. Handy had his Saint Louis woman with her diamond rings; I have my Cincinnati, Ohio woman with her diamond brains and I love her. One woman, one man. I mean that. One black woman is enough for any one black man, and when he passes 50 years, one black woman is too much for one black man.

As you well know, the most successful black children come from homes with both parents therein. The black family is systematically being broken

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down, when more and more families are headed by a female. This is not good for blacks. The family unit, where each member is tied one to the other socially, economically, biologically and psychologically, is the most basic unit for survival and blacks must protect this unit.

Now to our beautiful women at Mississippi State University and in this community -- resolve, today, that you will help your black men to think like men and plan like men. You, of all people, know that our struggle to be men has been a long and cruel one. For us, the struggle started on the shores of Africa and after 300 years, too many of us have not yet reached the promised land. Beautiful women who are here -- you are our spiritual "filling station". Most of your men are now at the halfway point of life -- help them to make their second half -- a monument to manhood.

A serious problem, with your men -- look in any book of facts and figures and you will probably find,

- That in education, he is behind
- In economics, he is behind
- In banking and finances, he is behind
- In computer training, he is behind
- In employment, he is behind
- In business ownership, he is behind

Moreover, the shoes on his feet, he did not manufacture; the glasses he wears, he did not make; and even the suit on his back was made by someone else. Your men are generally consumers and not producers -- even though blacks in 1983 had a gross spendable income of more than 130 billion dollars -- we must use

some of these billions of dollars to build and own factories, laboratories, businesses, etc.

Tell your men that they will never reach their manhood until more become producers. As individuals, most black men are impoverished -- but if their salaries, collectively, are taken for one year, there is wealth. Tell them that blacks must begin to save and pool their money for the purposes of investments and owning businesses -- so that the black youth in our families can look to us for help in reducing their high unemployment figures.

Another problem is that blacks do not generally work well with other blacks. If blacks are to successfully pool their salaries to become producers, they must believe in one another -- and lose that mentality that says, "products and services produced or rendered by blacks are inferior". Since slavery and up to the present -- it has been the custom for many blacks, for reasons unknown, to feel that it is better to buy from anyone or seek services from anyone -- except one who is black. The late Dr. Benjamin E. Mays illustrates this so beautifully. Allow me to paraphrase him.

-- When a black is ill with terminal cancer, and goes to the black surgeon -- and he operates, and the patient dies 6 months later; blacks will say, "I knew it, I told you so, that black doctor killed him!". However, when a black with the same terminal illness goes to the white surgeon -- and he operates, and the patient dies on the operating table, blacks will say with tears in their eyes, "It was God's will".

Another problem is drugs -- Too many blacks in our families are going on drugs because it is fashionable to do so. That is, to follow the practices of movie stars, star athletes, TV personalities and now personnel in our Nation's

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financial centers. The Monday, September 12, 1983, Wall Street Journal on its front page told of the growing use of cocaine among top traders in financial centers across the nation. Now we have pot head traders, pot head athletes, pot head movie stars, etc. Blacks have enough concerns without taking on the very serious drug problems that result from drug use.

Survival for the black family is the mind, and if the mind is broken, the person is broken; and, drugs will break the mind. The increasing usage of drugs by blacks represents a serious threat to our survival. I am aware that we will have a hard time turning blacks away from drugs when we get no help from the movies, TV and too many football and baseball star athletes. Our youths say too often, "If it is OK for them, why is it wrong for me?" Additionally, the mass media too frequently glorifies the star athlete; and, the movies and TV in their fiction glorify the pimp, the robber and the dope seller. I hope that the tragedy of John Belushi will help to show our young people that the use of drugs is death on an installment plan.

Our youth go to movies and/or watch TV and see that many actors portray that it is cool to be on drugs, to steal and to "Rip-Off" people. The movies and TV do not tell the youth that in real life when you steal and "Rip-Off" people to support the habit, you will eventually get caught and go to jail or die from its use.

Another problem is Education. It will be a sign of great progress for the black family when we say and mean it that, "our black children will be educated". Endurance or durability for black people is education. We must put our best minds forward to resolve our educational problems -- and resist the

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pervading temptation to explain away our academic problems. I would like to go back to the days of discipline; that is, when the school bell rang, the pupils "did not think they were boxers -- and it was time t[o] come out fighting." I would also like to return to the times when educators meant business. That is, they insisted that black students hold their heads high and challenged them to be the best. Telling them that success in education --

- is not inspiration but perspiration
- not opportunity but preparation
- not black power but brainpower
- not ignorance but enlightenment
- not reputation but accomplishment
- not starting but finishing school

To begin to again sing songs like "We are moving on up" and "Don't let anybody tell you that you can't make it" -- and to recoin phrases like "Learn baby learn so you can earn baby earn" -- and "Students will learn if they know they are expected to learn".

A possible solution for the black family in 1985 is to revitalize Dr. King's dream of, "We shall overcome". To overcome means there will be strong self-effort on the family to seek justice -- not generosity; to fight for equal opportunities -- not handouts; and, to fight for jobs -- not welfare. Moreover, it must work toward integration -- not disintegration -- and, particularly not go begging to the establishment for pity, sympathy or charity.

To overcome also means that the family must teach that "all black ain't beautiful and all white ain't right!" The black or white who rapes our women, steals our money, assaults our families, sells dope to our people, and pimps

is not beautiful. The beautiful black or white is the one who has struggled to obtain an education and poured great energy into doing well on his or her job; one who talks sense and not nonsense -- and who knows that brains and good manners are more important than the color of one's skin.

The time has long passed also when the black family can permit those few misguided whites, however well intentioned, to continue to lead us down the primrose path by telling us "to do nothing til you get your mule and 40 acres" -- and sell the idea to us that we should not take standardized or competency tests because they may be biased.

In response, the family must say we will never get that mule and 40 acres; so we should seize every opportunity to move ahead. Standardized and competency tests are here to stay. And -- we must take and pass them whether or not they are biased.

I close with -- Black Family members, "Learn baby learn -- so you can earn baby earn". We have travelled too far to turn back. So let us, "Sing a song full of the faith that the dark path has taught us. Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us. Facing a rising sun of a new day begun -- we shall march on til victory is won"!

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